

Myanmar military leaders must face genocide charges – UN report

Top military commanders in Myanmar should be investigated and prosecuted for the “gravest” crimes against civilians under international law, including genocide, [United Nations-appointed investigators](#) said on Monday.

The development follows the release of a report into the circumstances surrounding the mass exodus of more than 700,000 Rohingya people from Myanmar, beginning in mid-August last year – events previously described by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as a “[textbook example of ethnic cleansing](#)”.

The crimes committed include murder, rape, torture, sexual slavery, persecution and enslavement, according to the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, the investigators – Marzuki Darusman, Radhika Coomaraswamy and Christopher Sidoti – underlined the horrific and organized nature of the brutality meted out on civilians in Myanmar’s Rakhine state since 2011, as well as Kachin and Shan states.

“The fact-finding Mission has concluded, on reasonable grounds, that the patterns of gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law that it is found, amount to the gravest crime under international law,” Mr. Sidoti said.

“These have principally been committed by the military, the Tatmadaw,” he added, referring to Myanmar’s armed forces. “The Mission has concluded that criminal investigation and prosecution is warranted, focusing on the top Tatmadaw generals, in relation to the three categories of crimes under international law; genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.”

Included in the list of alleged perpetrators are Commander-in-Chief Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing and five other commanders.

“In Myanmar, there is a very clear chain of command,” Mr. Sidot explained, and added: “There is no doubt in our minds whatsoever that what we saw happen in Rakhine as a whole, would not have happened without it, firstly, being within the knowledge of the senior military leadership and secondly, under their effective control. And it’s because of the clarity of the chain of command in Myanmar that we have recommended the investigation and prosecution of these six.”

Of well over 800 testimonies gathered, one in particular highlighted the extent of the abuse, that of a survivor who fled to neighbouring Bangladesh. “I was lucky, I was only raped by three men,” she is quoted as saying.



OCHA/P. Peron

Residents of the Thet Kae Pyin camp for displaced people in Sittwe, Rakhine State, Myanmar. (file)

Such was the extent of the horrific violations that Ms. Coomaraswamy – a former UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict – said she was shocked by what she had found.

“The scale, brutality, and systematic nature of rape and violence indicate that they are part of a deliberate strategy to intimidate, terrorize, or punish the civilian population,” she said. “They’re used as a tactic of war that we found include rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, forced nudity and mutilations.”

Before the fact-finding Mission delivers its findings to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council in September, Chairperson Marzuki Darusman highlighted that one of the panel’s key recommendations required the attention of the UN Security Council:

“The Mission called for the situation in Myanmar to be referred to the international criminal court and that, of course, is the task of the Security Council to undertake. And so, the message to the Security Council is of course, ‘Refer Myanmar to the [International Criminal Court].’”

[UN condemns attack that leaves one](#)

'blue helmet' dead in Central African Republic

[Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has condemned the attack on 23 August by presumed anti-Balaka elements on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)) in which one peacekeeper from Burundi was killed.

In a [statement](#) issued by his Spokesman, Mr. Guterres offered his deepest condolences to the family of the deceased peacekeeper, as well as to the Government of Burundi.

The UN chief also recalled that intentionally directing attacks against United Nations peacekeepers may constitute a war crime and that sanctions can be applied against the perpetrators.

"He urges the Central African Republic (CAR) authorities to investigate them and swiftly bring those responsible to justice," said the statement.

Fighting between the mostly Christian anti-Balaka militia and the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition has plunged the CAR into civil conflict since 2012. A peace agreement was reached in January 2013, but rebels seized the capital, Bangui, in March of that year, forcing President François Bozizé to flee.

Concerned with the security, humanitarian, human rights and political crisis in the CAR and its regional implications, the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of MINUSCA in 2014 with the protection of civilians as its utmost priority.

The Mission said that on Thursday, suspected armed anti-Balaka fighters attacked MINUSCA personnel who were securing a logistics truck near the village of Pavika, located 22 km from Alindao, in CAR's Basse-Kotto Prefecture, which is in the southern-central part of the country.

Peacekeepers from the advanced MINUSCA Force military post at Pavika were *en route* to reinforce the convoy that evening when they were ambushed by another suspected armed anti-Balaka group. The blue helmet was killed in the ensuing shootout between peacekeepers and the attackers, who later fled the area.

In a statement, MINUSCA [strongly denounced](#) the "reprehensible attack" on peacekeepers "whose presence in the CAR has the singular objective of protecting the civilian population and supporting the Central African Republic in escaping the cycle of violence caused by armed groups."

The Mission also extended its condolences to the family of the victim and to the Government and people of Burundi.

UN Security Council welcomes results of Mali's presidential elections

The members of the Security Council on Friday welcomed the publication of the final results of the presidential polls in Mali, which saw the re-election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, and insisted on the urgent need to accelerate the implementation of the peace agreement.

The Constitutional Court of Mali validated a few days ago the provisional results of the second round of the presidential election and proclaimed Mr. Keita the victor.

In a [press statement](#), the Security Council congratulated the people and Government of Mali “for the generally peaceful conduct of the polls of July 29, 2018 and August 12, 2018, despite difficult security conditions and limited cases violence in certain areas.”

The 15-member body congratulated the Malian authorities for the preparation, conduct and conclusion of this election, within the constitutional framework. It also congratulated the Head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA), Mahamat Saleh Annadif, for his good offices throughout the electoral process.

The Security Council also congratulated all national, regional and international election observation missions, including those of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union and the UN. The European Union, for their positive contributions to the electoral process, as well as MINUSMA for its logistical and security assistance to the Malian government during the electoral process.

Council members called on all Malians “to join forces and work together to promote lasting peace and address the security and development challenges facing Mali.”

They expressed their intention to continue working with the Malian people and Government to support inclusive and sustainable peace and security throughout the country.

The members of the Security Council stressed “the absolute urgency” for the Government of Mali and the armed groups of the Azawad Platform and Movement Coordination “to take unprecedented steps to fulfill their obligations fully and rapidly remaining in the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali”.

The Security Council declared “that lasting peace and security in the Sahel region would not be possible without a full, effective and inclusive implementation of this Agreement.”

MINUSMA has been busy providing logistical support to the Government of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, especially in the restive north and centre, where an alliance of militant Islamists and Tuareg rebels have been launching attacks with increasing frequency and ferocity against government troops and UN peacekeepers.

When Mr. Keita was first elected in 2013, his administration replaced a transitional government which had wrested back control – with international support – of the outlying regions following a failed coup, that saw the iconic and ancient city of Timbuktu occupied by militants. Dozens of UN peacekeepers have made the ultimate sacrifice defending Mali's fragile recovery in recent years.

[DR Congo: Ebola outbreak spreads to eastern 'no-go' zone surrounded by rebels](#)

Rebel violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is escalating inside the vast country's Ebola-hit North Kivu province, putting millions at risk, the United Nations refugee agency warned on Friday.

"Thousands of civilians have [fled their burned-out villages](#), bringing reports of brutal attacks," Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson for the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#), told the regular press briefing in Geneva Friday, following reports that a case of Ebola infection and one suspected case have been found in one town in the area, Oicha, which is surrounded by armed groups.

The disease has killed more than 60 people and infected dozens more in recent weeks

Forced displacement in this part of the country remains massive. It is estimated that more than a million people are displaced in North Kivu. This is the highest concentration of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the DRC. An estimated half a million people have been forced from their homes this year alone.

At the same briefing, Dr. Peter Salama, WHO Deputy Director-General of Emergency Preparedness and Response, said that the discovery of Ebola infection in the hard-to-reach part of eastern DRC could mark a "pivotal" point in the response to the deadly disease.

"It really was the problem we were anticipating and the problem ... we were dreading. Our teams have responded this week. They've had to reach Oicha with

armed escorts... Once they reach Oicha, they are able to move within Oicha town more freely, because the town itself is a yellow zone from a security perspective," he explained.

Mr. Mahecic said UNHCR is particularly worried about the deteriorating situation in the Ebola-hit northern territory of Beni, where Oicha town is located. The area is home to some 1.3 million people. Spiralling conflict has left the population living there virtually in a state of siege since October 2017. Reports of increased human rights violations and restrictions of humanitarian access are frequent.

Estimates are that more than 100 armed groups are active in the province, continually terrorizing the population. Despite a large-scale military offensive of the Congolese Army against one of the main rebel groups, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) since January, there has been no let-up in the violence.

"Despite security challenges, a UNHCR team accessed the area north of Beni earlier this month and conducted humanitarian assessments in Oicha and Eringeti districts," he said, adding: "Residents told our staff about brutal attacks against the civilians carried out with machetes. Stories of massacres, extortion, forced displacement and other human rights violations are frequent."

Further, sexual and gender-based violence is rampant across the Beni territory. Many children are being recruited as child soldiers. The violence is particularly rampant in the so-called "triangle of death," between the towns of Eringeti, Mbau and Kamango, on the Uganda-DRC border, as well as in the towns of Beni, Oicha and Mavivi.

UNHCR is scaling up its capacity in North Kivu to respond to the growing humanitarian needs.

"We are arranging additional emergency shelters and other humanitarian assistance to meet the needs of the displaced in Beni. While UNHCR's humanitarian response is continuing despite the outbreak of Ebola, the prevailing security situation and drastic funding shortfall severely hamper our efforts. UNHCR's DRC 2018 appeal totalling \$201 million is only 17 per cent funded," explained Mr. Mahecic.

[UN agency chiefs condemn Saudi-coalition led air strike that killed dozens in western Yemen](#)

The UN humanitarian chief, [Mark Lowcock](#), and the head of the UN Children's

Fund ([UNICEF](#)), Henrietta Fore, have condemned the deadly air strike in Hudaydah governorate, in western Yemen, that killed at least 26 children and four women on Thursday.

“This is the second time in two weeks that an air strike by the Saudi-led Coalition has resulted in dozens of civilian casualties,” [said](#) Mr. Lowcock, noting that “an additional air strike in Al Durayhimi on Thursday resulted in the death of four children”.

Yemen’s conflict has its roots in uprisings that date back to 2011, but fighting escalated in March 2015, when an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily at the request of Yemen’s President.

Echoing a recent statement by UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), Mr. Lowcock, who is the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, called for an impartial, independent and prompt investigation into these most recent incidents.

“I am also deeply concerned by the proximity of attacks to humanitarian sites, including health facilities and water and sanitation infrastructure,” he stressed, adding that “the UN and its partners are doing all they can to reach people with assistance”.

Similar shock was expressed by UNICEF’s Executive Director who [stated](#) that she had hoped that the “outrage that followed [the Saada attack](#)” two weeks ago would be “a turning point in the conflict,” and that these latest attacks indicate that it was not.

Mr. Lowcock highlighted the need for improved humanitarian access and for conflict-affected civilians to have the ability to voluntarily flee the fighting to access humanitarian assistance too.

Both officials called the parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and those with influence over them – the UN Security Council and the international community – to ensure that “everything possible is done to protect civilians”, and to “end this conflict once and for all”.

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), Yemen is the world’s largest humanitarian operation as [three in four Yemenis are in need of aid](#). In 2018, so far, the UN and its partners have reached more than eight million people with direct life-saving assistance.